



Techno-sovereignism: the political rationality of contemporary Italian populism

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Abstract

This article provides an original exploration of the self-identified populist coalition leading the Italian government between 2018 and 2019. The analysis, informed by a governmentality approach, starts by scrutinising the economic, social, and cultural issues framed as political “problems” by the coalition, also highlighting the tensions underlying such constructions. The second step charts how this political subject sought to address those problems by deploying an array of political technologies. From examining these two dimensions, the article then can discern the composite rationality—techno-sovereignism—that drove precariously the coalition’s art of government. Finally, the article sketches out some forms of contestation against the techno-sovereignist operations, whose significance may stretch beyond the Italian borders. Overall, although the Italian populist coalition turned out to be ephemeral, the dynamics that characterized its emergence and functioning could still be used heuristically to understand the interactions and reciprocal adjustments possibly used by right-wing and technocratic populist groups to exert political power conjointly.

Keywords Five Star Movement · Governmentality · Italy · Mythological machine · Populism · The League

The coalition leading the Italian government between 2018 and 2019 explicitly self-identified as “populist” (*Il Sole 24Ore*, June 5, 2018). This was an unprecedented case in the Italian post-war history (Zulianello 2020). The invocation of a populist identity seemed to warrant a degree of coherence to the Yellow-Green¹ alliance otherwise split between two political forces—the “Five Star Movement” (5SM) and “The League”—

¹Yellow is the color of the Five Star Movement’s logo, whilst the green relates to The League’s traditional color.

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marked by different (and to some extent contradictory) histories claims and visions. This article charts the “governmentality” of the Yellow-Green coalition, that is, the tangle of epistemic, affective and mythological processes by which such a fluid political subject secured its existence framing a number of issues as political emergencies to be tackled by supposedly distinctive strategies (Rose and Miller 1992)

Although the Yellow-Green case has been the target of a sustained scholarly scrutiny (e.g., McDonnell and Vampa 2016; Engesser et al. 2017; Funke and Trebesch 2017; Mosca and Tronconi 2019), an analysis of its governmentality has not been outlined thus far. Yet this operation would be significant, for two interlinked reasons. The first is analytical: it could provide insights into how the Italian populist assemblage rationalized its genetic tensions translating them into relatively coherent political programs (Rose 2017). This has the potential to shed light on some constitutive dynamics, functioning diagrams and implicit frictions characterising other “new” populist alliances, and namely those characterized by a combination of right-wing and technocratic populist elements (Caramani 2017; Jansen 2017; Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2018; De Blasio and Sorice 2018). The second reason is normative and strategic: drawing out the Yellow-Green governmentality could help identify new targets for progressive anti-authoritarian political contestation, pointing to forms of critical disentanglement from the populist reach.

Background

Coalition’s history

The 5SM was founded in 2009 by a comedian (Beppe Grillo) and a web strategist (Gianroberto Casaleggio). The movement was characterized since its inception by a searing anti-establishment stance and a strong support for digital politics as well as direct democracy, re-moralization of politics, international humanitarianism, and environmentalism (Mosca and Tronconi 2019). The Northern League is a much older political subject. It was established in 1991 as a federation of regional parties of northern and north-central Italy, by Umberto Bossi (McDonnell and Vampa 2016). In 2013, Matteo Salvini defeated Bossi in a leadership election, rebranding the party as “La Lega” [The League] and reducing its original regionalist-federalist emphasis, whilst embracing nationalism, Euroscepticism and opposition to external immigration. In spite of the resonance with libertarian and right-wing/conservative motives respectively, both 5SM and The League’s leaders have always distanced themselves from the left–right paradigm, deemed as old and inaccurate (Caramani 2017).

In the 2018 general election, the 5SM was the largest Italian party whilst The League ranked third behind the Democratic Party. In May 2018, after three months of negotiations, the 5SM and The League struck a deal—formalized as a “*Contract for the Government of Change*”—on a common platform to bring a new government to Italy. They chose as premier a law professor, Giuseppe Conte, whose role was to “enforce” the Contract. The two parties’ leaders—Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio—held respectively the Home Office and the Labour Ministry apical offices as well as the shared deputy premier’s seat. In August 2019, The League announced a motion of no confidence against Conte, who then

resigned. This triggered a political reshuffle that resulted in The League pulling off the government, replaced by the Democratic Party, with, once again, Conte as prime minister, and therefore the end of the Yellow-Green experience.

Research context

Although this political conjuncture turned out to be ephemeral, it can still be used to generate insights into how other “new” populist coalitions—namely those that combine authoritarian right-wing and technocratic populism (cf. Zulianello 2020)—may stabilize their internal tensions in order to exert institutional power, and more broadly to allow an understanding of how such assemblages “think” and exert power (Foucault 1995, p. 201).

Therefore, the originality and significance of this paper should be situated with respect to the emerging literature on the intersections between contemporary right-wing populism and techno-populism. Both political approaches have been often described as striving to appeal to “ordinary people” (i.e., those who self-perceive as alien to any political/economic elite) advancing anti-elitist and anti-establishment stances (Mudde 2019). However, right-wing populism(s) tend to emphasize opposition to external immigration, anti-environmentalism, neo-nationalism, and protectionism (Greven 2016; Mudde 2019), whilst techno-populisms “predominantly, if not exclusively, compete by focusing on nonpositional issues such as the fight against corruption, increased transparency, democratic reform and moral integrity” (Zulianello 2020, p. 329), whilst highlighting the political significance of information technologies (Caramani 2017; Jansen 2017; Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2018; De Blasio and Sorice 2018).

Contemporary right-wing populism and techno-populism perspectives can converge in one single movement, or, like in the Italian case, characterize two parties in a coalition (Deseriis 2017; De Blasio and Sorice 2018; Brubaker 2020). In the latter case, the available literature focuses on preliminary differences and commonalities between those two stances and less on the dynamics that make them compatible (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2018). These dynamics are particularly interesting when techno-populism advances a value-based emancipatory understanding of technology (as, I contend here, the 5SM does). Additionally, although in the literature there is engagement with long-term political-economic factors, policy-outcomes, and political struggles from which “new” populisms emerge (De Blasio and Sorice 2018), there is a dearth of studies on the cultural formations enabling (and fed by) “new” populisms, from an anti-positivist angle (cf. Deseriis 2017).

Against this backdrop, this article provides a discursive analysis of the Yellow-Green assemblage arguing that combining a right-wing party and a techno-populist movement does not equate to creating a subject that simply includes both groups’ properties held together by political convenience (Prodi 2019). I contend that through certain epistemic, aesthetic, and affective dynamics some new properties arise whilst old ones are erased or emphasized, not without conflicts. Differently from other discursive analyses of techno-populism (Deseriis 2017), in this article the “techno” element of the Yellow-Green coalition is not (only) related to the use of information communications technology to achieve populist ends neither (only) to an epistemic *techne* (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2018). Technology emerges as characterized

by normative, affective, and aesthetic dimensions integral to a way of apprehending and rationalising the social world, instantiated in specific political tactics. Similarly, the “populist” element is more aptly qualifiable as “sovereignist,” that is, as advancing mythological-theological themes to appeal to (and circularly constitute) “the people.” Lastly, the analysis brings to the fore some key (and under-researched) constitutive tensions characterising the Italian case, their effects, and how to radicalize them from a strategic-normative perspective.

Analytical strategy

Methodologically, this article is informed by a re-elaboration of Michel Foucault’s notion of “governmentality” (Foucault 2007, 2008). In his courses at the Collège de France, between 1977 and 1979, Foucault reflected on how, in Europe, institutional/state power starting from the nineteenth century came to build itself around the relationships between population (i.e., people’s lives within a certain environment), government (i.e., the processes of defining the conditions for living) and security (as strategic effect of specific relations of power, knowledge, and subjectivity). As Rose and Miller have suggested “in his remarks on ‘governmentality’ Foucault sketches an alternative analytic of political power [that] sought to draw attention to a certain way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to know and govern the wealth, health and happiness of populations” (1992, p. 174). This analytic approach focuses on the epistemic strategies involved in the exercise of power and namely on the practices that frame certain phenomena as problems whose solutions justify the very existence of those exerting institutional power; on how such solutions are instantiated in operational programs, procedures, and techniques (whose effects retroact on those preliminary framings) targeting (and circularly constituting) a population; and on the overall rationalities (modes of apprehending and rationalising the social world) that can be drawn from the first two operations.

More recently, Rose (2017) has maintained that by using a “governmentality approach” we might understand some under-researched features of contemporary populism. The main point in Rose’s argument is that, while populist movements in, e.g., France, Austria, the United States, and the United Kingdom, may be “ephemeral,” they may begin to articulate a new set of rationalities and technologies for governing “after neoliberalism” (Rose 2017, p. 319). By looking at the new “ways of thinking” espoused by populist movements, it is possible to detect their key operative concepts, which, according to Rose, are “the people,” liberty, security, and control.

This article builds on Rose’s proposal, expanding critically the governmentality approach to include not only epistemic but also affective and mythological (Jesi 1976, 1979) dimensions whilst considering how to counter them, from a normative-strategic angle. From this analytical endeavour, progressive anti-authoritarian politics “might have something to learn about” the premises and functioning, as well as the possibility of contesting populist assemblages (Rose 2017, p. 310). If instead the Yellow-Green subject were downgraded to a mere product of political convenience (e.g., Prodi 2019) such a “learning experience” would be obliterated. This does not mean that political convenience (e.g., leaders’ political ambitions, reputational gains, and mere contingent interests) did not play a role in determining that coalition’s life-course. It rather means

that by using critically the approach outlined above we may be able to develop insights into the premises and workings of a “new” populist subject, which could be possibly generalized. In fact, although the findings presented below in the third and fourth sections partly converge with the extant literature on populism (e.g., Mudde 2004; Natale and Ballatore 2014; Pratt and Miao 2017; De Blasio and Sorice 2018), the remainder of the article brings to the fore fine-grained aspects of the Italian case that suggest, from a comparative perspective, considering similar features in other populist assemblages.

The article starts by analysing the economic, social, and cultural issues framed as political “problems” by the Yellow-Green coalition (Rose and Miller 1992 p. 174). The second step involves reconstructing how the coalition addressed those issues by devising and deploying certain political technologies (Miller and Rose 1990, p. 8). From examining these two dimensions, it is possible to infer those political rationalities, which, through strategic combinations (Rose et al. 2006, p. 88), drove precariously the Yellow-Green art of government (Rose and Miller 1992, p. 175). Problematics, technologies, and rationalities are reconstructed inductively by piecing together scientific knowledge, ethical doctrines, and cultural narratives encoded in a plurality of texts produced by the coalition (cf. Maglione 2019). Namely, the article considers the Contract for the Government of Change 2018, the 5SM Political Program 2018 and The League Political Program 2018, some much-acclaimed policy measures, that is, the Security and Immigration Decree 4 October 2018 n. 113 (“security package” 2018) and the Order and Public Security Decree 14 June 2019 n. 53 (“security package” 2019) as well as public speeches, interviews, and social media statements released by the coalition’s leaders. Finally, the article reconstructs the “mythological machine” (Jesi 1976, 1979) that worked as the stabilizer of the Yellow-Green assemblage. This “machine” is a key dimension of the Yellow-Green governmentality (and possibly of any populist governmentality), a fluid range of “original” symbols generating the cultural legitimation of the constitutively vacuous Italian “new” populism.

Problematics

The Yellow-Green coalition established itself around a range of social, political, economic, and cultural phenomena, framed as historical crises to be addressed through a combination of “unprecedented” interventions. Such “problematics”—post-2008 Italian economic-financial crisis, mass (extra-European Union) immigration, crisis of public order/security, and lack of political representation of certain areas of the citizenry—were only partly the result of the integration of the two parties’ political repertoires. In fact, coalition-specific conceptualisations also emerged, not without tensions.

Economic-financial crisis

A situation routinely evoked by Yellow-Green leaders was the Italian economic-financial crisis, particularly exacerbated after the 2008 crash. The main factor in the generation of this predicament was considered the EU’s conduct, seen as either helplessly caught up in such a crisis or responsible for it. As the Contract of

Government stated, “Historically the Italian Government has been submissive in Europe ... often preferring to leave the field to European interests opposed to national [economic] needs” (p. 9). The rhetorical operator in action here is the drawing of a neat dividing line between national economic “victims” and regional economic “perpetrators.” The specific causes of the Italian crisis, in fact, were deemed the EU single currency (based on German monetary standards), the “interference” in national politics (e.g., Bruxelles’ pressures to replace Berlusconi’s government in 2008 with an unelected “government of experts”) as well as the EU austerity fiscal rules (decided in remote venues by bureaucrats, merely aiming to raise taxes and reduce public spending as a way of reassuring the markets) (5SM 2018 Program, EU section; The League 2018 Program, Europe section). The 2008 financial crash was used as a symbolic signpost in this narrative. Its roots were described as the policy failures and large-scale bank bailouts, at both national and regional level (Engesser et al. 2017, p. 1117; Funke and Trebesch 2017, p. 8). As the Contract of Government declared, “The banking bail system has caused the destabilization of the credit in Italy with negative consequences for families, who have been expropriated of their own savings” (p. 14). Again, there was a clear divide between economic-financial elites (i.e., bankers) and “the people”: the first ones thrived out of the crisis whilst the latter paid its price. As The League’s 2018 Program promised, a “fiscal peace” (i.e., a tax condone) was necessary to re-establish economic justice after the crisis, and this would apply only to the financial crisis’ victims, i.e., families and small businesses, and not to “large tax evaders” (p. 4).

With respect to economic policy at least one source of tensions between The League and the 5SM should be noted. The latter, in fact, has traditionally advocated for radical environment-friendly policies, widely reflected in the 5SM Political Program 2018. This area was also considered in The League Program 2018, even though here it was emphasized the need to strike a balance between market and environment (p. 35). Environmental policies for The League are fundamentally economic matters, whilst for the 5SM the environment is an autonomous (normative) subject. The Contract of Government emphatically stated the need to “put the ecological issue at the centre of politics” (p. 10), however, all the substantive claims here seemed to express the implicit equation between environment and green economy, highlighting the partial devaluation of a 5SM’s flagship claim.

Immigration’s emergency

Immigration, framed as an emergency, and the economic-financial crisis were defined by the Yellow-Green coalition as inextricably linked. The “failure of the immigration system” is “clear,” as prime minister Conte stated during his first speech at the Senate (*Il Sole 24Ore*, June 5, 2018). This earnest claim echoed the Contract of Government’s diagnosis that “The current migration crisis is unsustainable for Italy, given its costs [bearing on] public funds ... often handled with little transparency and permeable to infiltration of organized crime” (p. 26). Fighting human trafficking was the “humanitarian” justification for a stricter immigration policy: “It is essential to disrupt the smugglers’ business which has caused landings and deaths in the Mediterranean Sea and dismantle organizations of international criminals who traffic in human beings” (p. 27). The “immigration business” refers to both professional smugglers and NGOs (mainly sea rescue missions) allegedly exploiting the solidarity-business for their own financial gain. The League 2018 Program 2018 committed to “Refuse

to disembark for NGOs [vessels] at the margins of the Libyan territorial sea, since their requests [to disembark] are based on self-induced shipwrecks and are a prelude to the exploitation of illegal immigration” (p. 6). Similarly, the Contract promised “transparency” regarding the financial operations of organisations that run immigration support services and those that operate rescue missions (p. 27). More explicitly, the Yellow-Green leaders emphatically described NGO rescue vessels as “sea taxis” complicit in human trafficking (*La Repubblica*, June 8, 2018a; *Huffington Post*, January 30, 2018).

Regarding immigrants, these were portrayed as indulging in lifestyles and adhering to beliefs often antagonistic to those of the Italian nation. However, although Salvini affirmed during the 2018 general election campaign that “[immigrants are] an army of benefit thieves and criminals” and then, once he became Home Office Secretary, that for illegal immigrants “the party is over” (*La Repubblica*, June 2, 2018b), the 5SM more cautiously preferred to frame immigrants as passive victims of human traffickers (*Reuters*, August 5, 2017).

From an explanatory angle, this two-sided representation related less to fears of racial contamination—i.e., on the assumption that immigrants threaten the racial integrity of the nation (Padovani 2018, p. 5565)—and more to economic fears of “too many” immigrants collapsing the system (McDonnell and Vampa 2016, p. 155). There was not an explicit biological racist claim here, since the coalition expressed its arguments in race-neutral or “colourblind” language (cf. Hogan and Haltinner 2015, p. 533; Bonilla-Silva 2019, p. 2).

“Race” was an off topic, but the fear of “religious” contamination was often underlined. As the Contract of Government stated: “For the purposes of transparency [and] of preventing possible terrorist infiltration ... it is necessary to adopt ad hoc legislation on registering the ministers of worship and on the traceability of the funding for the construction of mosques” (p. 28). Additionally, “control and immediate closure of all radical Islamic associations as well as mosques and places of worship, however called, which are irregular” (p. 28) were promised. This religious-based suspicion had as a specific target a generalized Islam against which The League’s leader would use catholic claims and iconography, e.g., by kissing the rosary in highly mediatized public events (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 27, 2019).

Security’s decline

In the government’s policy the immigration/security link was insistently stressed (the 2019 security package’s official name was “Security and Immigration Decree”), often employing “asylum seekers” as a critical discursive object. From this perspective, the Contract of Government maintained that “... in order to guarantee a correct balance between [immigration] security and public order, it is then necessary to establish that offenses committed by asylum seekers will justify their immediate removal from the national territory” (p. 27). An implicit connection between asylum seeking and crime was drawn, whereas the mere existential condition of “asylum seeking” would qualify an offence as more serious, justifying a ban/removal from the host nation. The League, more than the 5SM, historically engaged in building a contentious relation between immigration and crime, “by establishing an explicative chain, at the same time causal, rational and metaphoric, to connect immigrants, unemployment, criminality, welfare crisis, taxes and future uncertainties” (Biorcio and Vitale 2011, p. 186).

According to The League's political discourse, (illegal) immigrants produce insecurity and the stopping of all incoming immigrants is a national priority (Brunazzo and Roux 2013, p. 20) as also epitomized by the 2018 and 2019 "security packages" (see below).

However, insecurity is not only about immigrants' invasion. A further (domestic) expression of the current security's crisis, partly shared by the 5SM, was the idea of "moral security" weakened by two different phenomena: the recognition of civil rights to same-sex unions and the diffusion of "immoral" crimes, i.e., corruption. The League started its fight against same-sex unions in 2016, when Salvini publicly invited mayors to "disobey the [same-sex civil unions] law" (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 11, 2016) whilst declaring that "There is only one family: the natural one,"² built around a man and a woman (The League 2018 Program, p. 51). The 5SM instead never openly countered same-sex unions with traditional familistic claims, oscillating between early support and a relative indifference toward the topic.³ The other domestic security threat, this time conceptualized similarly by both parties, was corruption, a typical elite crime, against whom new punitive and remoralising measures were promised (5SM 2018 Program, p. 2; The League 2018 Program, p. 32). The Contract of Government, in fact, identified an ad hoc punishment for corrupt civil servants, that is, a perpetual ban from public offices additional to tougher penal (custodial) measures (p. 30).

Lack of voice

Conte in his first speech at the Senate proclaimed that "If 'populism' is the attitude of the ruling class to listen to people's needs [then we] deserve this qualification" (*Il Sole 24Ore*, June 5, 2018). The "world wide web" within this context was presented as facilitating the articulation of people's voice. As Conte assuredly added, "Internet access must be guaranteed to all citizens as a fundamental right and a precondition for the effective exercise of democratic rights" (*Il Sole 24Ore*, June 5, 2018). This understanding was a distinctive 5SM's contribution to the Yellow-Green alliance. Within the 5SM narrative, the web offers endless and new political possibilities, and in fact, in the 2018 Program "Connectivity" was one of the macro-subjects, with "30 min free internet for poor people" being a much-voiced promise during the 2018 electoral campaign (*La Repubblica*, June 26, 2018c). The web is viewed as a liberating force, the main actor of change within a free-market-oriented understanding of progress (Natale and Ballatore 2014, p. 112). It is a "supermedium" (Casaleggio and Grillo 2011, p. 7) that will radically transform all social, informational, and organizational processes and will contribute to remoralising politics by reducing "corruption in a technologically deterministic way, fostering radical transparency" (Natale and Ballatore 2014, p. 112).

Overall, the 5SM's discourse shares some themes with the so-called "Californian ideology," that is, a combination between anarcho-libertarian stances (i.e., direct democracy), laissez-faire capitalism and technological determinism that emerged in

² Retrieved from The League's official website https://www.leganord.org/index.php/notizie2/8607-La_famiglia_%C3%A8_una_sola_quella_naturale

³ Retrieved from the 5SM's official blog <https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2019/04/il-nostro-impegno-per-le-famiglie-in-10-punti.html>

the 1990s from the US high-tech industry (Natale and Ballatore 2014, p. 112). This ideology is characterized by a strong faith in the emancipatory power of the new digital technologies, and fuses (not without tensions) aspects of anti-corporate ethos with a laissez-faire approach to the economy. The 5SM's cyber-narrative particularly emphasizes the “electronic agora” of direct democracy and less the neoliberal “electronic marketplace” driven by competition and efficiency (Natale and Ballatore 2014, p. 112). The remainder of this article will show that some of the political tensions within the coalition were rooted in the 5SM and The Leagues' diverging understandings of technology and its political purchase.

Political technologies

The solutions imagined by the Yellow-Green coalition to what they framed as national emergencies were then addressed by “mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities [sought] to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions” (Rose and Miller 1992, p. 175). Namely, such technologies focussed on enforcing a defensive-reactive type of social order, ensuring an exclusive type of citizenship linked to programs to regenerate the nation and emphasising the new political role(s) of digital technologies.

Enforcing defensive security

The 2018 “security package” and its 2019 follow-up were presented as flagship Yellow-Green interventions. These established a number of measures marked by a “law and order” approach, e.g., tightening up to 4 years of penalties for “squatting,” extra funding for police forces, and financial penalties for each irregular immigrant sea-rescued and brought to Italy. Similarly, mayors were empowered to take new administrative initiatives in order to improve their towns' “decency,” e.g., by banning people who were a “threat to public health” from so-called “red zones” (e.g., public parks or schools' proximities), by closing Roma people's dwellings and by policing more strictly public protests. These were all administrative acts that limited people's basic freedoms (e.g., circulation) on fluid grounds (e.g., decency), weakening typical rule of law safeguards. Here, the new rules on self-defence occupied a special place. The 2018 “security package” established that self-defence is always legitimate (i.e., it is always proportionate regardless of the threat) when it takes place within one's home. This measure expressed a functional equivalence between “security”—i.e., social response to essential needs—and “defence”—i.e., violent protection from external dangers—and between one's “home” and “our country,” elevating the self-enforcement of rules to a non-negotiable value (Panarari 2018).

Within this context, a certain concept of “victimhood” acquired an unprecedented political saliency. The Yellow-Green assemblage gave great “emphasis to victims' accounts of their experiences, rather than to the detached, objective analysis of experts. In this respect, crime victims [are] given a new kind of authenticity and authority” (Pratt and Miao 2017, p. 13). Victims are respectable, ordinary citizens whose experience becomes universal as the danger they face—they are “the people” (Rose 2017), whose interests are defended by “new” populisms. The coalition's victims were the “family”

(declined as “traditional family” within The League’s narrative) challenged by the economic crisis and new non-conformist same-sex unions as well as the taxpayers’ betrayed by corrupted political elites holding public offices and threatened by the “immigrants’ invasion.” This victimhood is something more than being a crime victim, it is a permanent state of potential victimisation (an existential fear) conflated with fears of otherness that inform people’s daily conduct and “demand preventive measures that erode fundamental features of public law and criminal justice in modern society” (Pratt and Miao 2017, p. 13).

Ensuring ascriptive citizenship

Two different concepts of citizenship featured in the Yellow-Green political programs. The first referred to citizenship as a status (typified by The League’s motto ‘*Prima gli italiani!*’ [Italians First!]) (*The Guardian*, December 1, 2018), that is, an ascriptive idea of citizenship (De Blasio and Sorice 2018, p. 3). From this angle, The League’s 2018 Program symbolically stated that “for a ‘refugee’ the State will not commit funds higher than those allocated to a 100% disability pension of an Italian citizen” (p. 7). The other concept, advanced by the 5SM, was that of citizenship as a body of civic knowledge (affiliative citizenship), represented as a tool to improve the quality of democracy towards a participatory style” (De Blasio and Sorice 2018, p. 3).

However, in the government’s practice, The League’s concept took priority. The “security packages,” and particularly the new rules on immigrants’ reception centers, were clearly informed by a citizenship-as-status concept. The 2018 “security package” extended the permanence-confinement within reception centers from 90 to 180 days and established that citizenship was revoked for foreigners who committed crimes not necessarily serious and even for those who returned to their country for a short period. Broad requirements (which give room for arbitrary administrative interpretation) for the granting of citizenship were introduced, e.g., absence of convictions, irreprehensible conduct, minimum income, fulfillment of tax obligations, as well as the extension of the terms for investigating the acquisition of citizenship. Perhaps the most paradigmatic provisions here were the cancellation of “humanitarian protection” as a ground for granting asylum and the exclusion of the local council’s registration for asylum seekers. The first measure included also the denial of renewing the humanitarian asylum for those who were already granted it, causing in this way a massive “irregularization” of immigrants (Firouzi Tabar 2018). The second was a clear message to “asylum seekers”: they are not integral to the polity, not even when it comes to basic welfare provisions dependent on the registration into the local council’s registry.

This emergencial approach to immigration, i.e., the focus on containment/selection of migratory movements conceptualized as a security threat, appeared as integral to this political technology. However, it should be remarked a partial inconsistency between the two components of the Yellow-Green assemblage with respect to this point. The 5SM 2018 Program (Immigration section), in fact, openly criticized the emergencial approach to immigration, whilst stressing the need for a “fair sharing of responsibilities” at the EU level in the “management/distribution of immigrants.” Additionally, it advocated for “international humanitarianism” to tackle the root causes of global migration flows. The points of convergence with The League were then confined to the

conceptualisation of immigration as a “problem” and an economic-oriented approach to “immigration management.”

Producing “people’s economics”

Yellow-Green political-economic technologies were informed by an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards capitalism. In general, the 5SM has traditionally framed the web as both the ultimate marketplace and a virtual agora that will be populated by more informed and rational citizens (Natale and Ballatore 2014, p. 114). Additionally, it has advocated for measures supposedly ensuring equality of opportunity and active political and economic citizenship such as the universal basic income. The League instead has always supported market-oriented economic policies (Biorcio and Vitale 2011, p. 195), as expressed by traditional claims to reduce the power of unions and to extend the enterprises’ freedom of laying off. At the same time, both parties espoused projects of economic nationalisation, promising the creation of a national bank for investments (Contract of Government, p. 13).

The Contract proposed two types of measures to tackle the economic-financial crisis that cut across the ambivalent attitude seen above. The first type consisted of “anti-EU” instruments. From this perspective, the Contract promised that, after the revisions of EU treaties, policies would have been funded by a multi-year plan “to cut wasteful spending, manage debt and an appropriate and limited recourse to deficit spending” (Contract of Government, p. 17), instead of by fiscal austerity measures backed by the EU. The second group were “people-oriented” measures. The Contract established tougher sanctions, including prison, for tax evaders, managers, and regulators responsible for bank failures as well as a tax condone for people struggling to pay tax arrears. The abolition of the pension reform that raised the retirement age, cuts to so-called “golden pensions,” and a national bank for investments were also highly touted measures. Finally, the 5SM’s flagship intervention: the creation of a universal basic income (emphatically called “*citizen income*”) for the unemployed (Contract of Government, p. 34). This was described as a “conditional universal” support: recipients are obliged to look for work and accept one of the first three job offers received, otherwise the support will be revoked. The citizen income applies also to people who are not Italian citizens, however with strict conditions (10 years regular residence minimum, last 2 years with no interruptions, income certification in Italian from the applicant’s State).

In this context, there were some tensions between a market-oriented approach (The League) and a more left-libertarian vision (5SM). The League in fact has always been wary of any type of income support, seemingly discouraging (particularly immigrants’) “hard work” (*La Stampa*, May 30, 2019). Yet, there was convergence on projects of economic nationalization (i.e., the creation of a national investment bank) and on anti-EU and people-oriented measures such as the fiscal condone or punitive measures for bank managers.

Regenerating the nation

The structural conflict between “globalisation losers” to “globalisation winners” is a well-known populist trope (Campani and Pajnik 2017). This translates into claims of

restoring national sovereignty as the only way to empower national losers. Both The League and the 5SM were sympathetic to a return to (or at least re-empowering of) the nation states, recovering sovereignty from supranational institutions, such as the EU.

The demands of “more nation” were articulated mainly by displaying traditional (even folkloristic) Italian strengths and by contesting the effects of globalisation. Regarding the first rhetorical strategy, the 5SM 2018 Program, for instance, highlighted “the valorisation of the made in Italy” by an “e-commerce platform for made in Italy products in the world, greater protection of cultural assets, safeguarding the quality of Italian products threatened by international treaties” (p. 1). Similarly, the Contract emphasized that “Italy is a nation with a touristic vocation thanks to the historical, cultural, landscape and natural heritage and to excellence such as, for example, food and wine, fashion, design, unique in the world” (p. 50).

The League is a rather unique case of a regionalist party “gone national,” leaving its original claims for northern regional autonomy behind (Albertazzi et al. 2018, p. 650). In their 2018 Program’s cover page there was a clear reference to “The pride to belong to the most beautiful country in the world,” whilst in the “security packages” there were several expressions of this “defensive” approach (e.g., citizenship is revoked for foreigners who commit crimes not necessarily serious or stricter requirements for granting citizenship). A further strategy to recover people’s lost sovereignty, particularly espoused by the 5SM, is participatory democracy. By using a software (called “Rousseau”) that enables “certified” party members to vote on issues selected by party leaders in order to inform parliamentary action, “the people” apparently become rational citizens, active stakeholders informing policy instead of passive entities ruled more than ruling (Mosca and Tronconi 2019, p. 1261).

Rebuilding the nation was presented as something beyond the right/left spectrum, a non-negotiable priority. As one of the intellectuals close to the 5SM claimed: “The future political conflict will no longer be between the right and the left, but between those who accept globalization and those who wish to challenge it. Globalists against sovereignists, so that being against globalization means, today, recovering the idea of nation” (Becchi 2017, p. 104).

Digitalizing politics

Networked communication platforms constituted the theatre whereby Yellow-Green politics was re-formulated, in a direct, intimate, simple, and denunciatory way. However, to think of them as mere communication means would be appropriate only for The League’s approach to social media, whereas a 5SM’s key contribution to the coalition was to advance a broader normative understanding of digital technologies (and not simply social media).

From the “instrumentalist” perspective, social media are not bound to the mediation of traditional gatekeepers, supporting a direct link between politics and citizens that bypasses professional norms and news values of mass media (Engesser et al. 2017). The elites were often said to control the traditional media,⁴ hence social networked platforms would help overcome such a supposed obstacle. In fact, populist leaders often claim to speak directly to “the people” by using such “structurally disintermediate” communication forms (Bracciale

⁴ The official 5SM blog has dedicated a large number of posts to this subject https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2018/09/la_proprieta_dei_giornali_andra_indicata_nella_testata.html

and Martella 2017, pp. 1311–1312). Among these new media, Twitter plays a central role in hybridising and redefining the traditional cycle of political information, since conversations that take place there often influence the coverage and agenda of traditional media.

During the coalition's life, the Home Office Secretary (@matteosalvinimi), tweeted an average of 4000 times and posts an average of 1000 pictures per year, and the 5SM (@Mov5Stelle) an average of 3000 per year. Salvini also used automated profiles and bots to support Twitter's multiplicative effects (Piccinelli 2019). In January 2019, the hashtag #SalviniNonMollare (advocating Salvini's judicial immunity) generated 25 million retweets while the new tweets were 90 thousand, using bots and automated profiles (Piccinelli 2019).

Further, networked social media are characterized by emotionalizing storytelling by sharing feelings, moods, or revealing insights, in an informal, simple, and taboo braking way (Bracciale and Martella 2017, p. 1314). This perfectly fitted with The League's communication style encapsulated by viral pictures of Salvini driving bulldozers with reference to how to "end" Roma dwellings or wearing shirts with police or fire service insignia, systematically posted on twitter (BBC, January 7, 2019). Similarly, the use of hashtags such as #STOPINVASIONE [Stop Invasion] or #starbucksghome expressed the aggressive, emotionalized, and dichotomic political narrative espoused by The League.

Social media also offer a new denunciatory-acclamatory instrument. By providing a virtual scaffold to condemn elites publicly, social media contribute toward an immediate, here-and-now vilification of the enemies even as they "promote a kind of public virtue" (Sanscartier 2017, p. 61). Salvini's statement "you must live on Mars" to Tito Boeri, chairman of the National Social Welfare Institute (INPS), when the latter contested some data provided by the Home Office (*Il Giornale*, July 5, 2018), epitomized this denunciatory-acclamatory character, aiming to incite public sentiment, affect, or mood against elites/experts who are removed from people's real problems (Dean 2017, p. 419).

However, as stated above, technology from the 5SM's perspective is (mainly) a normative ideal. Technology—namely the Internet—not only enables but actually *is* the space of direct democracy. The Internet is where political delegation appears as both immoral and unnecessary, the key condition for the formation of a collective and intelligent political will. For this reason, although "Rousseau" and the 5SM's Blog were key political technologies, the Internet remained a normative ideal (*BBC News*, December 7, 2012), to be empowered to realize, as Casaleggio argued, a "digital revolution that would flatten the priesthoods of politics, government, and journalism, and replace them with decentralized webs of direct participation" (*Wired*, February 14, 2019).

Political rationality

It is now possible to infer from the problems, solutions, and technologies outlined above a tangle of common epistemic, moral, aesthetic, and theologico-political traits that can be then pieced together into an overall political rationality. This is a heuristic device that helps understand how the coalition's internal tensions were (precariously) stabilized by generating a common "mentality."

Epistemic modes

The Yellow-Green assemblage, similarly to other “new” populist movements, routinely dichotomized “perpetrators” and “victims,” drawing on common knowledge as it simplified and emotionalized public issues. Dichotomisation is a typical populist epistemic strategy, well implemented by networked social communication platforms. As Mudde remarked (Mudde 2004, p. 543), one of the defining aspects that renders any populism a “thin” ideology is that they “consider society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups—“the pure people” versus the “corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” By dichotomising public issues, the Yellow-Green art of government demanded people to make in/out decisions, further generating dichotomous friend/enemy distinctions (cf. Schmitt 2007). This epistemological strategy enacts a form of drastic polarisation: any issue is simplified and trivialized until its good/bad essence emerges and in/out decisions can be made. Examples are the dichotomies of self-defence/self-endangerment, Italians first/immigrants’ invasion, technological innovation/stagnation, moralising politics/corruption.

The “common sense” or “people’s knowledge” is the only source of valid knowledge, well symbolized by The League’s 2018 Program’s subtitle—“*The common sense revolution.*” As Rose argued, “For knowledge is not to come from the experts with their arcane languages, their supposedly scientific calculations that have so often proved wrong, their demeaning of “common sense.” On the contrary, to see is to know—the knowledge that is to inform this rationality is the knowledge that “everyone knows”” (Rose 2017, p. 314). This particularly applies to immigration as a security threat: “the proposition that immigration increases crime is often presented as common knowledge, requiring little empirical proof” (Hogan and Haltinner 2015, p. 529), but also to the basic universal income as an instrument to ensure “active citizenship.”

This epistemological apparatus individualizes responsibilities for immigration or economic failings, and the causes of corruption. It obliterates deeper and broader economic, social, and cultural contradictions that may underpin political problematics, in the name of “the common sense revolution” (cf. Rose 1998, p. 165).

A final epistemic mode characterising the Yellow-Green rationality, was its “crisis-making” approach to reality. The coalition’s gaze consistently construed political problems as crises, once again simplifying epistemically the social reality. Such crises were evoked, mediated, and performed, becoming a precious rhetorical-symbolical resource to be exploited to radicalize the political debate and advocate for a strong leadership (Moffitt 2015). A crisis here is a dangerous situation (e.g., immigration’s emergency or security’s decline) that poses people at immediate risk, it is self-evident and polarising, requires immediate interventions (“security packages,” custodial punishments for corrupt bankers, etc.) and limited negotiations, accompanied by a public display of the “successful” responses

Affective strategies

The Yellow-Green political rationality is both emotionally productive and repressive. It evokes and channels people’s interests and desires into emotional demands toward “the other” (EU, asylum seekers, NGOs), it draws friend-enemy boundaries, it prioritises

blame for moral wrongdoing as a critical political experience. The idea of excluding by inclusion “the other” contributes toward creating a form of affective justice that very much resembles lynching (Berg 2011). Exactly like lynching, the Yellow-Green coalition aimed to retaliate against the perpetrators, dishonouring and degrading them publicly, with a “cathartic release of powerful emotions” (Garland 2005, p. 820). The “stagers” of lynching spectacles deliberately choose to transgress the “traditional” (non-technological, remissive toward EU, corrupt) forms of politics, to make themselves exceptions to the rule (Garland 2005, p. 829). In this way, they become the external enforcers of a sovereignty that applies to “the people” and their enemies but not to the “exceptional” sovereign itself.

Operationally, lynching de-socializes security and securitizes personal safety (Schuilenburg 2012, p. 75). Security becomes a mere negative/private state of immunisation from moral risks and dangers—e.g., immigrants and corrupted elites—justified by an inconsistent array of classical liberal themes (non-intrusion in “home affairs,” self-defence), libertarian motives (techno-enabled politics), right-wing appeals (to the nation and the “traditional family”), and neoliberal claims (market-orientation). Clearly, this promised state of security can never be achieved; life cannot be completely secured, without killing life itself, and dangers cannot be exorcized without re-evoking them (Kotsko 2018, p. 2). Therefore, lynching is a program in endless tension, targeting phantoms of otherness more than material conditions of security (Chandler and Reid 2016).

Lynching is pleasure-giving. It allows “the people” to exert their “freedom-against” suitable enemies, providing a space for a here-and-now catharsis. In this context, whether policy achieves its goals is irrelevant. Actually, policy failures are integral to this mode of governing whose main goal is *being in tension* toward the pleasure-giving (and impossible) immunisation from moral risks and dangers. This affective dynamic has a distinctive subjectivizing effect—it generates *non-people*. To some extent, and paradoxically, this is a “populism without people” (Revelli 2018). Yellow-Green non-people are individuals glued together by a reactive solidarity bond against “the others,” representing the end of all previous socio-political subjectivities. The Northern people, the techno-people, the people of the right were recombined (Revelli 2018) as a collection of atoms bound together by reactive affects, a “non-people” otherwise devoid of a “self,” more than, e.g. a traditional fascist *Volk*. To closer inspection, this non-people was particularly informed by The League’s powerful affective strategies, which to some extent co-opted and neutralized the 5SM’s original ideas of citizen-experts or immigrants-as-victims.

Mythological operations

For the Yellow-Green governmentality, the mythopoesis served the purpose of stabilizing its constitutively unstable (and vacuous) identity. A “mythological machine” is a way of thinking about how human groups constitute themselves as a culture, i.e., how they produce their own origins, and what enables this operation, i.e., a mechanism that generates legitimising/foundational materials, an engine of original stories, whose origins are however inaccessible (Jesi 1976). These mythological stories are fabricated by manipulating historical materials to produce an eternal present cast against an idealized past and projected toward a redemptive future. History’s conflicts and nuances are neutralized, and the uncertainty that constitutes the future is erased, to

legitimize the present. This machine is both aesthetic and political since it simultaneously engenders literary space (social media narratives), imaginary (the pure nation, the web as “supermedium”), utopia (a moralized place with no immigrant or crime), and alternative experiences of existence (the possibility of enfranchising “the people”) (Belpoliti and Manera 2010). The coalition’s aesthetic element was particularly salient. The Yellow-Green mythologies, in fact, consisted of emotionally-loaded and destructive images (e.g., the bulldozer vs. Roma camps or “sea taxis” vs. rescue vessels) entangled with “wordless ideas” (Jesi 1979, p. 24), i.e., normative and “self-explanatory” keywords: Nation, Web, Sovereignty, People, Immigrants, Elites. These images-plus-language ultimately worked as self-referential justifications, “original-with-no-origin,” passed as obvious and natural. Their “essential” nature was possibly ensured by their theological roots (Jesi 1979, p. 186; cf. Schmitt 2005). The reactive idea of sovereignty as people’s vengeance against elites was the transcendent core of the Yellow-Green art of government opposed to purely secularized political assemblages (e.g., the EU, corrupted political elites). Both the muscular leaders officiating this expiatory vengeance as messianic figures and the purity (national and technological) they cultivated, appear as theological images. Purity is ‘the people’s defining feature, their assumed moral integrity intensified to the highest—transcendent—degree. Pure is both the nation and the web’s redemptive force, their creative-destructive tension, ensuring not only cohesion, transparency, and efficiency, but also a messianic palinogenesis. Similarly, the idea of victimhood as a “substance, essence, intrinsic nature ... ensures the [theological] nexus between innocence and potency” (Giglioli 2014, p. 57), legitimising any claim, making irresponsible the claimant though demanding their salvation. By the same token, who acts in the victim’s name is, by definition, doing justice more than politics and as such appealing to higher non-negotiable beliefs, which require responses based on faith more than reason.

From this perspective, it is possible to rationalize the populist “rage” against immigrants and corrupt elites: both are vehicles of contamination (multicultural, religious, and moral) of the people’s pure core. Therefore, they were included-by-exclusion, framed as constitutive enemies to be evoked and sacrificed in order to fill the vacuity of this political assemblage. This ultimately means that populism, not only the Italian one, is not about blind rage, but about politics—constructing and conducting the polity—grounded in mythologies, buried under a commonsense imaginary.

Techno-sovereignism

The Yellow-Green art of government generated (and provided “solutions” for) issues overlapping with those produced by other right-wing or techno-populist movements, i.e., economic-financial crisis, immigration emergency, security’s decline, people’s lack of voice, and the need of technocratic means (Caramani 2017; Deseriis 2017). Similarly, the technologies deployed to respond to such predicaments, i.e., penal-administrative law, ethno-citizenship, political-economic and new media, were not completely specific either. The Yellow-Green knowledge—dichotomising, emotionalized—reducing any type of issue and their causes to moral wrongdoing and therefore calling for lynching—enabled by virtual scaffolds (new social media)—also seems recurrent in “new” populisms (Mudde 2004).

However, the Italian case was characterized by the emergence of specific combinations and tensions and this may suggest that similar dynamics are integral to other “new” populist coalitions. The Yellow-Green assemblage included partly diverging concepts of citizenship, economic policy, and immigration creating significant tensions within the coalition. These tensions were stabilized (but not neutralized) by several processes described above as constituting a mythological machine. The production of legitimising material systematically passed on as common-sense and morally pure was a key feature of this populism (and perhaps of any populism). Its political-theological nature aimed to transform state sovereignty into a messianic force against immanent political, social, and economic antagonists.

Techno-sovereignism, here, captures the (precarious) tangle of epistemic, affective, and mythological operations underpinning the Yellow-Green modes of apprehending and rationalising the social world. This rationality entails, as a common thread between right-wing and techno-populist elements, the cultivation of a “centripetal” freedom fuelled by an existential insecurity, whereby otherness is a threat to be constantly evoked as a constitutive enemy (Rose 2017, pp. 316–317). Techno-sovereignism also captures the theological-political transcendence of the nation (sovereignism) and the blurring of the boundaries between *polis* and *oikos* through the web (technocracy) in order to produce a “new” political agora. However, the web is not a mere means to achieve the greater end of avenging the nation, as the tensions within the coalition highlighted. Technology and nation, in fact, are predicated on diverging concepts of order, respectively: individuals instrumentally associated in bottom-up “tribes” and a national polity organized by centralisation and unification. This appears as the fundamental cleavage at the heart of techno-sovereignism. The mythological materials layered upon this rift helped the Italian assemblage to survive, but the constitutive tension remained as never fully reconciled.

These tensions (and the coalition’s endeavours to neutralize them) were particularly visible with respect to the conceptualisation of “market,” “immigration,” and “environment.” As for the former, on the one (sovereignist) hand, the market was stripped of any theological connotation—a mere economic device to be used to empower non-people; on the other, the market was the epistemic environment where technology thrives and people empower themselves as active subjects supported by the “citizen income.” The only connection between these two views was the framing of the (capitalist) free market as a taken-for-granted pillar of the national economy. Regarding immigration, the techno-sovereignist assemblage seemed to oscillate between civic racism/nativism and economic “rationalisation,” finding a *trait-d’union* in the conceptualisation of immigration (particularly “Islamic”) as a crucial national problem.

There was also a clear opposition between The League’s economisation of environmental issues and the 5SM autonomous environmentalism combined with a participatory democratic approach. This opposition, exemplified by the Turin-Lyon railway issue (see next section), was only partly covered (mythologically) by the ideas of “people’s economy” and the restoration of “people’s voice,” remaining a significant fracture in the Yellow-Green mentality.

A key element that kept the techno-sovereignism assemblage together was its redemptive promise. The coalition presented itself as the only force capable of freeing the forgotten people from the shackles imposed upon them by corrupted elites, opening a new messianic time where elites would atone, after lynching, for their moral faults and “the people” would thrive in a secured political, social, and cultural space.

Contesting techno-sovereignism

The Yellow-Green government ended due to The League's motion against the slow progress of the Turin–Lyon high-speed railway, a project contested by the 5SM due to its environmental impact (*The Telegraph*, August 9, 2019). It is likely, as some analysts have highlighted (*The New York Times*, August 20, 2019), that this conclusion was also a matter of political convenience related to The League's leader's personal ambitions. However, coherently with the approach adopted in this article, this section considers heuristically how to radicalize the tensions affecting the techno-sovereignist mentality, from a normative (anti-authoritarian) angle, in this way briefly providing additional tools to contest other authoritarian/techno-populist groups.

A first strategy could be short-circuiting bottom up (Scott 1990) the mythological machine that hid the constitutive tensions at the heart of that coalition. Operationally, a first tactic could be the mediatization of the “fearless speech” (Foucault 2001) through new technologies. Examples of these were the public critiques put forth by Roberto Saviano, a journalist who currently lives under around-the-clock police protection due to his work on the Italian mafia, and the civil disobedience enacted by Domenico Lucano, a mayor of a small Italian town (Riace) and by Carola Rackete, captain of the rescue vessel *Sea Watch-3*. Saviano used consistently social media to expose the strategic simplifications of the Home Office on immigration (e.g., by launching the campaign #InMareNonEsistonoTaxi [In the open sea taxis do not exist]) and, as a response, he was threatened by the Home Office to lose his police protection (*La Repubblica*, June 21, 2019a). Lucano led an innovative approach to dealing with refugees, allowing hundreds of them to settle among locals, revitalising Riace and preventing the closure of the local schools (*BBC*, 10 January 2011). In return, he was charged for helping illegal migrants to stay in the country. Rackete, in the summer 2019, decided to breach the Italian coast guard blockade in order to bring stranded migrants to an Italian “safe harbour,” Lampedusa (France24, June 26, 2019), risking a criminal charge and a custodial sentence.

Despite the Yellow-Green violent reactions, these “free speakers” kept contesting, endangering their own life. In these cases, political contestation morphed into mediatized civil disobedience, aiming both to radicalize the Yellow-Green contradictions, bringing to the fore its bare violence (which is their affective cipher), and to generate new mythologies, alternative imaginaries of co-existence built around the idea of social solidarity.

It is also possible to transform this parrhesia in a lower-threshold form of political disentanglement. I am thinking here of some *gestures*, in Giorgio Agamben's terms (Agamben 2018), directed toward the Yellow-Green mythological machine. “Gesture” here means any operation that renders a political mythological machine inoperative, non-effective, in this way opening it up to new possible uses, generating spaces for freedom and re-invention. Amplifying “asylum seekers” voices by video-reporting their personal stories and experiences of dispossession during their “detention” on rescue vessels blocked by police coast guards helped restore their humanity stripped by lynching dynamics (*La Repubblica*, June 25, 2019b). The micro-sabotaging of high-profile Yellow-Green leaders' use of political-communicative technologies is a further example. Namely, anti-homophobic photobombing of the Home Office Secretary or the exposition on private balconies of banners with the Italian constitutional chart's sections on freedom of speech, during Yellow-Green rallies (*The*

Guardian, May 11, 2019). These ideas of alternative flash mobs became viral on social media and traditional media outlets, triggering a wave of micro-sabotaging actions that impacted on Yellow-Green leaders' use of social media, that is, their exploitation of a crucial political technology.

Conclusions

Understanding the Italian Yellow-Green coalition as a techno-sovereignist subject can help us interpret (and contest) “new” populisms’ features and appeal. These pose puzzling challenges to progressive politics, offering unprecedented political spaces to release emotions by lynching “the other” and avenging “the people,” whilst easing their internal tensions through mythological operations. However, to consider these movements merely as cathartic “spaces” would mean to downplay their distinctively political nature—lynching dynamics, victimhood rhetoric, networked social media are all *instrumenta regnii*, that is, governmental devices.

This article uncovered these dimensions, with respect to the Yellow-Green coalition, by drawing from public speeches, political programs, and parliamentary proposals, the political problematics, technologies, and rationalities constituting the Yellow-Green art of government. In this way, it brought to the fore both the common rationality engendered by the encounter between a right-wing party and a technocratic movement (characterized by dichotomisation and lynching dynamics) and the constitutive frictions emerging from this encounter (regarding, e.g., the concepts of market, immigration, and environment). The article argued that such tensions were glued together by a “mythological machine” that precariously stabilized the coalition’s identity. Therefore, the article suggested that if one wants to hinder a subject like the Yellow-Green coalition it should halt its “mythological machine.”

A key analytical implication of this work is that right-wing populism and technopopulism appear as reciprocally adaptive political subjects able to articulate a common (although unstable) political rationality whose features and dynamics may be reproduced elsewhere by other political assemblages. This means that it is not unlikely that coalitions similar to the Yellow-Green one could form and lead governments elsewhere. This also means, from a normative-strategic perspective, that the tactics sketched out above on how to radicalize the gaps integral to the Yellow-Green rationality, could turn useful to contest other similar coalitions. Gesture-oriented political tactics, such as mediatized parrhesia, civil disobedience and micro-media-sabotaging may be routes to fuel the contradictions at the heart of techno-sovereignism and to take a step toward alternative forms of coexistence built around social solidarity.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest No conflicts of interests to be disclosed and no funding bodies have supported this work.

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